AMENDMENTS TO THE CLAIMS

1. (Original) A method for enabling intercommunication among a plurality of users accessing the same Internet web page, each user accessing the Internet through a respective client computer, the web page operating on a content server computer, the method comprising the steps of, when a first user requests intercommunication service via a first client computer:

sending from a control server to the first client computer a first signal which creates on the first client computer's display of the web page a resident animated character for which the first user controls the appearance, position, movement, and any multimedia output produced by the resident character; and

sending from the control server to the first client computer a second signal which creates on the first client computer's display of the web page a visitor animated character which is entirely out of the first user's control, the control server controlling at least the appearance, position, movement, and any multimedia output produced by the visitor character in accordance with a signal received by the control server from a second client computer.

2. (Original) The method of claim 1 wherein the first and second signals install first and second computer subprograms which are executed on the first user's presentation of the web page, the first computer subprogram including a login process which initiates the resident character and a client listening process which remains on the first client computer and responds to incoming signals from the control server.

3. (Currently Amended) The method of ~~any preceding claim~~ claim 2 wherein the second signal creates a plurality of visitor characters, each controlled by the control server in accordance with a signal received from a different client computer.

4. (Currently Amended) The method of ~~any preceding claim~~ claim 3 further comprising the step of operating a listening process on the control server which is responsive to a signal received from any client computer.

5. (Original) The method of claim 4 further comprising, when the received signal is indicative of a change in appearance, position, movement, or any multimedia output produced by the character corresponding to one of the users, generating a control signal representing the change and sending the control signal to the client computers of the users other than the one user.

6. (Original) The method of claim 5 wherein when one of the other users receives the control signal, that user's representation of the character corresponding to the one user is changed accordingly.

7. (Currently Amended) The method of ~~any preceding claim~~ claim 6 wherein the control server opens a new chat room when an initial user requesting intercommunication enters a web page or when all existing chat rooms corresponding to the web page are full.

8. (Original) The method of claim 7 wherein the control server adds a user requesting intercommunication to an existing chat room which is not full.

9. (Currently Amended) The method of ~~claim 7 or 8~~ claim 8 wherein the control server closes a chat room when the last user remaining in the chat room exits therefrom.

10 (Currently Amended) The method of ~~any preceding claim~~ claim 9 wherein the control server opens a private chat room upon the request of a plurality of the users.

11. (Original) A control server for enabling intercommunication among a plurality of users accessing the same Internet web page, each user accessing the Internet through a respective client computer, the web page operating on a content server computer, the control server comprising, a signal generator responsive to the request of a first user via a first client computer for intercommunication service, said signal generator producing:

a first signal sent to the first client computer which creates on the first client computer's display of the web page a resident animated character for which the first user controls the appearance, position, movement, and any multimedia output produced by the resident character; and

a second signal sent to the first client computer which creates on the first client computer's display of the web page a visitor animated character which is entirely out of the first user's control, the control server controlling at least the appearance, position, movement, and any multimedia output produced by the visitor character in accordance with a signal received by the control server from a second client computer.

12. (Original) The control server of claim 11 wherein the first and second signals are constructed to install first and second computer subprograms which are executed on the first user's presentation of the web page, the first computer subprogram including a login process which initiates the resident character and a client listening process which remains on the first client computer and responds to incoming signals from the control server.

13. (Currently Amended) The control server of ~~claim 11 or12~~ claim 12, wherein the second signal is constructed to create a plurality of visitor characters, each controlled by the control server in accordance with a signal received from a different client computer.

14. (Currently Amended) The control server of ~~any of claims 11-13~~ claim 13 further comprising a listening processor on the control server which is responsive to a signal received from any client computer.

15. (Original) The control server of claim 14 further comprising a control signal generator cooperating with the listening processor when the received signal is indicative of a change in appearance, position, movement, or any multimedia output produced by the character corresponding to one of the users, said control signal generator generating a control signal representing the change and sending the control signal to the client computers of the users other than the one user.

16. (Original) The control server of claim 15 wherein the control signal is constructed so that when one of the other users receives the control signal, that user's representation of the character corresponding to the one user is changed accordingly.

17. (Currently Amended) The control server of ~~any of claims 11-16~~ claim 16 further comprising a chat controller which opens a new chat room when an initial user requesting intercommunication enters a web page or when all existing chat rooms corresponding to the web page are full.

18. (Original) The control server of claim 17 wherein the chat control is constructed to add a user requesting intercommunication to an existing chat room which is not full.

19 (Currently Amended) The control server of ~~claim 17 or 18~~ claim 18 wherein the chat controller is constructed to close a chat room when the last user remaining in the chat room exits therefrom.

20. (Currrently Amended)The control server of ~~any preceding claim~~ claim 19 wherein the chat controller is constructed to open a private chat room upon the request of a plurality of the users.

21. (Original) A method for enabling communication between users accessing a web page on a computer network, each user being connected to the network through a respective client computer using an operating system which produces multilayer window images on a computer screen, the web page operating on a content server computer connected to the network, said method comprising the steps of:

creating at least one transparent layer over the display of the web page on the users' computers;

introducing for each user each user an animated character object on the at least one transparent layer;

providing code with each character permitting the corresponding user to control at least one of appearance, position, movement, and multimedia output produced by the respective character;

providing a control server on the network which is in communication with the client computers and relays communications between them;

whereby a chat room for the two users is created over the web page.

22. (Original) The method of claim 21 wherein the character objects are objects in the Flash program.

23. (Original) The method of claim 22 wherein the character objects are avatars.

24. (Currently Amended) The method of ~~any one of claims 21-23~~ claim 23 further comprising the step of creating a storage facility in which a character may leave a message for another character.

25. (Currently Amended) The method of ~~any one of claims 21-24~~ claim 24 wherein the communications relayed by the control server include at least one of: a user's modification of the appearance or position of his character; a user's movement of his character; and a user's creation of multimedia output through his character.

26. (New) The method of claim 1 wherein the second signal creates a plurality of visitor characters, each controlled by the control server in accordance with a signal received from a different client computer.

27. (New) The method of claim 1 further comprising the step of operating a listening process on the control server which is responsive to a signal received from any client computer.

28. (New) The method of claim 1 wherein the control server opens a new chat room when an initial user requesting intercommunication enters a web page or when all existing chat rooms corresponding to the web page are full.

29. (New) The method of claim 1 wherein the control server closes a chat room when the last user remaining in the chat room exits therefrom.

30. (New) The control server of claim 11, wherein the second signal is constructed to create a plurality of visitor characters, each controlled by the control server in accordance with a signal received from a different client computer.

31. (New) The control server of any of claim 11 further comprising a listening processor on the control server which is responsive to a signal received from any client computer.

32. (New) The control server of claim 11 further comprising a chat controller which opens a new chat room when an initial user requesting intercommunication enters a web page or when all existing chat rooms corresponding to the web page are full.

33 (New) The control server of claim 17 wherein the chat controller is constructed to close a chat room when the last user remaining in the chat room exits therefrom.

34. (New) The method of claims 21 further comprising the step of creating a storage facility in which a character may leave a message for another character.

35. (New) The method of claim 21 wherein the communications relayed by the control server include at least one of: a user's modification of the appearance or position of his character; a user's movement of his character; and a user's creation of multimedia output through his character.

36. (New) The method of claim 1 wherein the control server opens a private chat room upon the request of a plurality of the users.

37. (New) The control server of claim 11wherein the chat controller is constructed to open a private chat room upon the request of a plurality of the users.